

# Exploring the Challenges of Information Seeking Behaviour Among Students: A Special Reference to Vavuniya South Zonal Education Office, Sri Lanka

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## ABSTRACT

The study "Exploring the Challenges of Information Seeking Behaviour Among Students: A Special Reference to Vavuniya South Zonal Education Office (VSZE), Sri Lanka" investigated the relationship among Information Challenges (IC), Information Resources (IR) and Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) among 235 students. The purpose of the study was to find out how information barriers affect students' information-seeking behaviour and how information resources that affect effective information access. Random sampling method was used to choose the sample from the population, the structured questionnaires were used to collect data, and reliability, regression, and correlation analyses were performed to look at the findings. Reliability analysis revealed that the measures of Information Challenges ( $\alpha = 0.701$ ), Information Resources ( $\alpha = 0.784$ ), and Information Seeking Behaviour ( $\alpha = 0.738$ ) were sufficiently consistent for research purposes. According to correlation analysis, there was significant correlation between Information Challenges and Information Seeking Behaviour ( $r = -0.035, p < .008$ ), while there was a strong positive association between Information Resources and Information Seeking Behaviour ( $r = 0.303, p < .001$ ). The findings show that the availability and accessibility of information resources are crucial in encouraging students' information-seeking behaviour, but the difficulties they confront do not significantly hinder their attempts. Based on these findings, the VSZE Office should strengthen information resources, establish information literacy training, increase accessibility and assistance, and routinely monitor and assess services to guarantee effective utilisation. The study emphasises the relevance of well-organised, easily available information resources in assisting students' learning and academic activities.

**KEYWORDS:** Information Resources, Information Challenges, Information Seeking Behaviour, Students, Sri Lanka.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant elements of our daily life is now information. Information seekers search in a range of circumstances and in a number of methods to meet their information demands. Information is essential for personal,

professional, and societal purposes. However, these people have distinct information needs. Information seekers utilise several methods to do research, search, choose, and share information (Humbhi et al., 2022).

The entire process of acquiring information has accelerated with the advent of the internet and other technologies (Singh et al., 2015). Nowadays, knowledge is necessary for everyone's personal usage, career advancement, and societal survival. These people, however, have distinct information demands from one another. Information seekers employ a variety of methods for their research, searching, selection, usage, and sharing. We refer to these strategies, tactics, and procedures as information-seeking behaviours. Information-seeking failure, as well as the issues that young people face while looking for information, are frequently discussed in reports on research initiatives. However, they have seldom established a definite subject for inquiry from the start of the project. This is despite the fact that what is acquired in these fields has an obvious potential to improve information system design and information skills instruction. Understanding of problems and failures has been gained gradually through studies that have been more broadly concerned with children's use of libraries, paper materials, electronic resources, or specific information-finding tools, or with information-seeking in response to specific curricular assignments in schools (Shenton, 2008).

Professional literature has been using the term "information-seeking behaviour" since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Manjunath & Babu, 2018). In recent years, there has been substantial controversy concerning students' Information Seeking Behaviour activity due to the broad availability of material on the internet and worries about plagiarism (BBC News, 2006). According to (Graham & Metaxas, 2003), students tend to overuse web resources without thinking or evaluation. Researchers and practitioners are questioning if there has been a significant shift in young people's content search and research habits. Looking at younger students, there have been recent reports of a rise in the usage of social media and mobile devices for coursework (Dahlstrom, 2012).

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Online information resources are crucial in higher education for life-long learning and activation. They offer global accessibility, free applications, and communication opportunities. However, limited access to these resources can hinder students' ability to research, write assignments, and develop lifelong learning skills. A study by (Adomi et al., 2004) found that undergraduate students in Nigeria, particularly male students, have limited access to these resources. Additionally, most undergraduate students make little or no use of electronic resources provided by the university library, despite the high cost. This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and propose policy and practical interventions to improve access and use of these resources. Empirical evidence is needed to inform policy and practice interventions aimed at addressing this issue. The study aims to provide empirical evidence to inform policy and practice interventions to improve the use of electronic resources in higher education.

## **3. OBJECTIVES**

- ✓ To determine the typical challenges that students have while seeking academic and administrative information at the VSZE Office.
- ✓ To evaluate current methods that students employ to solve information-seeking problems.
- ✓ To provide suggestions for increasing information access and support services at the VSZE office.

## **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **4.1 Use of online information resources**

Looking for information. The term "behaviour" refers to the actions and behaviours performed to collect information. According to (Sheeja, 2010), individuals seek information when they think their current knowledge is insufficient to address certain questions. According to (Case & Given, 2016), knowledge seeking behaviour is a natural part of human existence, especially when making important decisions. In the words of (Majid et al., 2000) "information-seeking behaviour is a set of actions that an individual takes to express information needs, seek information, evaluate and select information, and finally use this information to satisfy his or her information needs."

(Abdoulaye, 2002) investigated the information-seeking behaviour of African students at International Islamic University Malaysia. The study found that utilising the library altered the information-seeking behaviour of IIUM students. (Gyesi, 2020) emphasises the need of efficient information resources and services in libraries to suit user demands. (Hiller, 2002) discovered that University of Washington undergraduate students prefer to study at the library rather than searching for articles or books (Wright et al., 2006).

School and university libraries have traditionally served as information hubs for students, teachers, staff, and researchers (Ozioko, 2007). According to him, school libraries act as both a storehouse for published knowledge and an intermediary for getting resources from other sources. According to (Croom, 2000), the 1990s saw significant advancements in digital technology, giving school students and scholars several possibilities. Students use many online resources such as Wikipedia Online, Bioline, Google Books, Reference Desk, Internet Public Library, Litsum, Encyclopaedia of Life, Answer.com, Questia, and Farmer's Almanack (Croom, 2000).

### **4.2 Insufficient Funds for Acquiring ICT Facilities**

Accessing information might be challenging due to technological and literacy barriers. According to (Amuchie , 2015), there are challenges in accessing information and training registered students to satisfy their educational needs due to financial constraints. African universities have few learning materials and lecturers, and those that are available are sometimes prohibitively expensive for both students and universities. Inadequate ICT infrastructure causes difficulties in accessing current information on the internet (SAIDE, 2009).

### **4.3 Lack of Relevant ICT Knowledge**

The use of ICT in library services, including resource storage, retrieval, and dissemination, has led to obstacles for students in obtaining library material. To properly use the library's information technology, students must be exposed to and knowledgeable about it. Students who lack ICT abilities struggle to properly retrieve information. The introduction of ICT resources in libraries has led to a requirement for students to be instructed on how to utilise them efficiently to access information and further their studies (Aliyu , 2011).

### **4.4 Library Education**

According to ( Ukonu et al., 2012), UNESCO recommends the following requirements to promote library teaching in Nigeria using modern information and communication technologies: To achieve high academic standards, students and teachers require access to digital technologies and the internet in classrooms, laboratories, and

workshops, as well as access to high-quality, culturally responsive digital content. Teachers must also have the necessary knowledge and skills to use these tools and resources effectively.

#### **4.5 Lack of Information Literacy Skills**

According to (Reitz , 2004), information literacy involves teaching clients how to use library resources, services, and facilities effectively. This includes both prescribed and unauthorised instruction from a librarian or staff member, whether one-on-one or in groups. The course uses electronic lectures, audio-visual materials, manuals, and trailblazers. Students face the difficulty of becoming information literate, which requires them to recognise the need for information and effectively discover, appraise, and use it.

#### **4.6 Information Retrieval Skills**

The goal of learning commons, according to (Jain, 2008), is to introduce a service style that reduces multiple service stations to a single service station in the shutdown team work of innumerable service associates. This includes an IT technician, help desk, reference information desk, learning support services, academic services, research support, and information literacy. Therefore, all of the aforementioned online services will be inaccessible to pupils who lack the necessary information retrieval abilities.

#### **4.7 Awareness of Information Communication Technology Facilities**

( Ukonu et al., 2012), pointed out the main issues influencing library usage and knowledge, such as the fact that staff members do little to educate students about the resources available and that students are unaware of them. "The true problems with technology are exposure, awareness, access, and actual use".

### **5. Methodology**

The study area of the VSZE Office is 1AB, 1C, Type II. The study total population is 650. The sample was selected using a random sampling procedure. Random sampling was used to choose students due to limited access, time constraints, and unavailability of their lists and connections. The sample size included 242 secondary junior students from the 1AB, 1C, Type II of the VSZE Office. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's method. Structured questionnaires were the major approach for data collection. Among the 242 questionnaires, 235 were completed correctly and included in the study. There is a 97% response rate. The acquired data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27.0.

## **6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Age**

**Table 1** Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
13-14	5	2.1
15-16	228	97.0
17-18	2	.9
Total	235	100.0

According to the data shown in Table 1 the majority of respondents (97%) were aged 15-16. Only some of them were young (13-14 years, 2.1%) or older (17-18 years, 0.9%). This indicates that almost all research participants were in the middle of teenage age group.

## 6.2 Gender

**Table 2** Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
male	86	36.6
female	149	63.4
Total	235	100.0

According to Table 2 Out of the 235 respondents, 63.4% were female and 36.6% were male, indicating that females constituted the majority of the sample.

## 6.3 Grade

**Table 3** Grade

Grade	Frequency	Percent
Grade 10	115	48.9
Grade 11	120	51.1
Total	235	100.0

According to the Table 3 grade distribution, there was nearly equal participation in the two grade levels, with 51.1% (n = 120) of respondents in Grade 11 and 48.9% (n = 115) in Grade10.

## 6.4 School Type

**Table 4** School type

School Type	Frequency	Percent
1AB	75	32.0
1C	76	32.3
Type 11	84	35.7
Total	235	100.0

According to the Table 4, Among the 235 participants, 35.7% were from Type 11 schools, 32.3% from 1C schools, and 32.0% from 1AB schools, indicating a nearly equal distribution across school types.

## 6.5 Correlation Coefficient

**Table 5** Pearson's Correlation coefficients among variables

Variables	IC_avg	IR_avg	IS_avg
Information Challenges	1		
Information Resources	-.201**	1	
Information Seeking Behaviour	-.035	.303**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the links between information challenges, information resources, and information-seeking behaviour. A significant negative relationship was found between information challenges and information resources ( $r = -0.201$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There was no significant correlation identified between information challenges and Information Seeking Behaviour ( $r = -0.035$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Furthermore, a significant positive connection was identified between information resources and Information Seeking Behaviour ( $r = 0.303$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that respondents with better access to information resources engaged in more information-seeking.

### Information Resources

**Table 6** Regression Analyses of Information Resources

Regression weight	Beta coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	f	P - value	supported
IR- IS	3.441	.092	22.157	.000	Yes

Table 6 shows simple linear regression was carried out to see if Information Resources predicted Information Seeking Behaviour. The study found that Information Resources strongly predicted Information Seeking Behaviour ( $B = 3.441$ ,  $R^2 = 0.092$ ,  $f(1, 233) = 22.157$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This study provides support to the hypothesis, implying that more access to information resources leads to higher information-seeking behaviour among respondents.

## 6.6 Regression

### Information Challenges

**Table 7** Regression Analyses of Information Challenges

Regression weight	Beta coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P - value	supported
IC- IS	4.274	.001	27.249	.008	Yes

Table 7 shows simple linear regression was carried out to see if Information Challenges predicted Information Seeking Behaviour. The study found that Information Resources strongly predicted Information Seeking Behaviour ( $B = 4.274$ ,  $R^2 = 0.001$ ,  $f(1, 233) = 27.249$ ,  $p < .008$ ). This study provides support to the hypothesis, implying that more access to information resources leads to higher information-seeking behaviour among respondents.

## 6.7 Reliability

**Table 8** Reliability

Name of the variable	No. of Samples	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Information Challenges	235	14	.701
Information Resources	235	12	.784
Information Seeking Behaviour	235	11	.738

Table 8 shows Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the research variables. Table 1 shows that the Information Challenges scale has sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = 0.701$ ). The Information Resources scale had good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.784$ ), while the Information Seeking Behaviour scale had acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = 0.738$ ), indicating the need for further refining in future investigations.

## CONCLUSION

The study "Exploring the Challenges of Information Seeking Behaviour Among Students: With Special Reference to the VSZE Office" identified major elements impacting students' information-seeking behaviour. The findings show that, while students experience certain information challenges these challenges have no substantial influence on their information-seeking behaviour. Instead, access to the availability of information resources were shown to have a favourable and significant impact on students' information-seeking behaviours. This emphasises the importance of well-organised and easily available information resources in promoting successful learning and academic activities among students at the VSZE Office. Improving resource availability and usability can therefore help to overcome possible barriers to efficient Information Seeking Behaviour.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the VSZE Office should improve the availability and organisation of physical and digital information resources to better serve students' learning and research needs. Regular information literacy activities, such as workshops and training sessions, can help students improve their ability to locate, evaluate, and use information. Improving accessibility and assistance, including user-friendly library systems and proactive guidance from library personnel, can assist students in overcoming possible information barriers. Furthermore, constant monitoring and assessment of library services based on feedback and usage statistics will assure ongoing development, whilst activities to enhance knowledge about existing resources and services will encourage students to use them optimally.

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